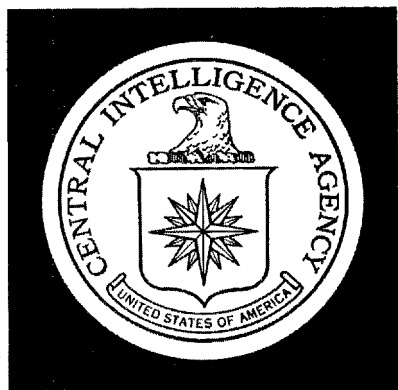


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

The Impact of Operation Attleboro

OSD review completed

NSA review completed

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14 December 1966



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
14 December 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Impact of Operation ATTLEBORO

Summary

Although the recent month-long probe by a large allied task force into the Communist stronghold in Tay Ninh Province did not permanently impair the Communist capability in the area, it apparently disrupted Communist plans for a "winter-spring" campaign in the region.

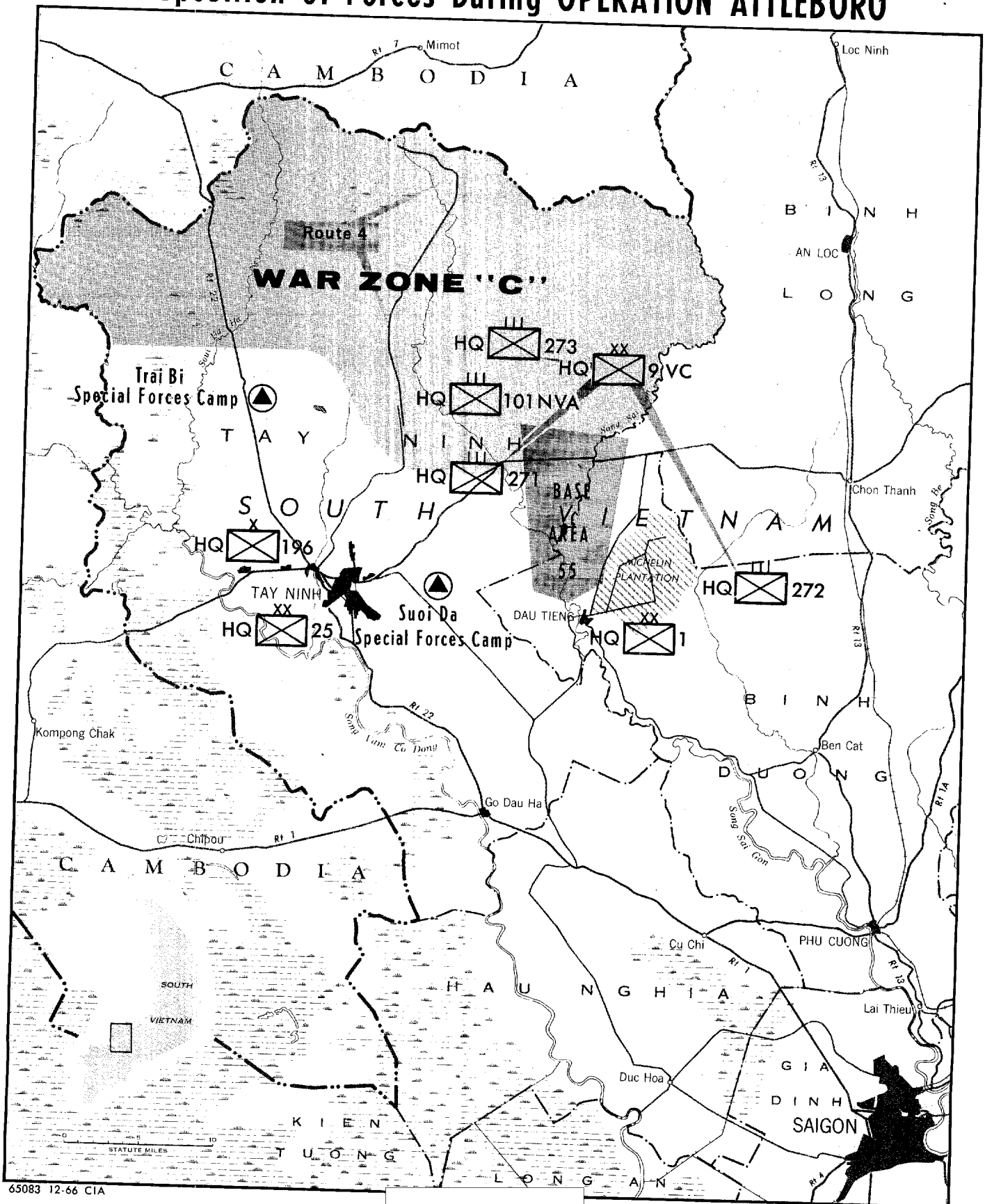
Heavy personnel and equipment losses were inflicted on the Communists, and the current combat capabilities of the main enemy units in the province are considered marginal. A heavy flow of refugees from the area was stimulated by the operation, which will put a further strain on the enemy manpower pool in the area. The allied offensive also demonstrated to the Communist leadership the growing vulnerability of their formerly uncontested preserves to allied mobile warfare and mass assault tactics. The enemy has almost certainly been shaken by the size of his losses in meeting large allied forces in head-on combat, and there are indications that ATTLEBORO and other recent allied sweeps have helped spark the new Communist emphasis on guerrilla warfare.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and with the Director's special assistant for Vietnamese affairs.

OSD review completed

ATTLEBORO appears also to have demonstrated Sihanouk's increasing awareness of the risk of Cambodian involvement in the war if Communist units are permitted to move freely into Cambodian territory while seeking refuge from the allies. Reportedly, Sihanouk ordered Cambodian troops to resist the entry of Viet Cong units fleeing from ATTLEBORO.

Disposition of Forces During OPERATION ATTLEBORO



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Concept and Objectives

1. Operation ATTLEBORO, involving the largest allied task force ever fielded in the Vietnam war, evolved largely out of a reaction to Communist offensive initiatives against the US 196th Infantry Brigade near Tay Ninh city and South Vietnamese CIDG Special Forces units near the Michelin Plantation at Dau Tieng on 3-4 November.

2. Elements of the US 196th Infantry Brigade, in conjunction with CIDG units, had begun the initial phase of ATTLEBORO on 14 October in an area east-northeast of Tay Ninh city. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The primary mission of the 196th, [REDACTED] was a reconnaissance-in-force ground sweep designed both to probe enemy defenses and gather intelligence on road and trail trafficability in the area for use in planning a major US operation in December against Viet Cong War Zone "C." After nearly three weeks of negligible contact with the enemy, Viet Cong forces on 3-4 November attacked and inflicted heavy casualties on company-size US and CIDG elements which had become scattered in dense jungle terrain in their respective reconnaissance areas.

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3. As the battle developed, the US military command seized the opportunity for a major engagement with the enemy, adapting some of the existing plans for the major US offensive originally scheduled for December. As ATTLEBORO ultimately grew to 19 battalions (17 US and 2 ARVN), the primary objective became the destruction of the maximum amount of enemy personnel and war materiel.

4. The bulk of allied troops committed to ATTLEBORO operated primarily in and around a Viet Cong - infested region known as "Base Area 55," located some 10-20 miles east-northeast of Tay Ninh city on the southern periphery of War Zone "C." Most of the major fighting in ATTLEBORO occurred in or near this area, and it was here that Communist main force units sustained their heaviest losses.

5. At one point during the operation, however, a task force composed mainly of two US mechanized battalions executed a successful and relatively unopposed deployment along Route 4 from Tay Ninh city northward through the heart of War Zone "C" to within $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the Cambodian border. The maneuver was intended primarily as a test to determine the allied capability to penetrate a region such as War Zone "C" with mechanized vehicles.

Viet Cong Procedures

6. A MACV study of Viet Cong tactics in ATTLEBORO has provided some additional insight into the nature of Viet Cong defensive capabilities and battlefield discipline in War Zone "C" and its environs. According to this study, bunkers (many of reinforced concrete) utilized by the Viet Cong were camouflaged with natural foliage described as "almost perfect." Allied forces were often unable to spot such bunkers until they were too close to use weapons with enough power to destroy them. Many of the allied casualties were sustained as a result of Communist bunker fire.

7. Enemy withdrawals in the area of operations were orderly and well organized, due probably to good communications and/or to extensive rehearsal in training exercises. Ammunition appeared to be plentiful and was fired without regard to expenditures. Enemy mortar fire was particularly accurate.

Why ATTLEBORO Ended

8. According to MACV sources, there were several reasons for the termination of the operation on 25 November. In the first place, contact with the enemy during the final ten days of the action had dwindled to light and sporadic sniper, mortar, and small-arms fire. Secondly, the allied force, comprising more than 15,000 men, had been in the field on sustained combat operations for nearly a month and, with the prospects of further fruitful contact doubtful, rest and regroupment were in order. Lastly, and perhaps most important, there was concern that further offensive thrusts by ATTLEBORO forces into War Zone "C" would upset the surprise

[REDACTED]

potential for the more decisive action initially planned for December--but now probably postponed until January at the earliest.

Short-Term Achievements

9. The most immediately significant accomplishment of Operation ATTLEBORO appears to have been its spoiling effect on the so-called "winter-spring" campaign of the Viet Cong 9th Light Infantry Division, which [REDACTED] included plans for major assaults on allied Special Forces camps at Trai Bi and Suoi Da in Tay Ninh Province. The heavy casualties inflicted by ATTLEBORO on major elements of the 9th Division and the 101st North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment (1,100 killed and 40 captured) have almost certainly forced the Communists' principal fighting force in Tay Ninh Province into a period of regroupment, resupply, planning, and training. Analysis of recent Communist communication patterns tends to confirm the disruption of the principal enemy units in the area.

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10. The combat capabilities of the 9th Division and the 101st NVA Regiment have been substantially reduced. Of the nine infantry battalions subordinate to the 9th Division, three are now estimated to be combat effective, three marginally effective, and three noneffective. The three battalions of the 101st NVA Regiment are rated as marginally effective. MACV estimates that it will require a minimum of three months for the 9th Division to return to its normal combat effectiveness.

11. The Communist military position in northern Tay Ninh Province was also at least temporarily weakened by the capture or destruction by allied forces of vast quantities of enemy fortifications, war materiel, and foodstuffs. The following is a partial list of significant items either captured or destroyed during ATTLEBORO:

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Equipment Captured

128 individual weapons
 19 crew-served weapons
 2 M/79 grenade launchers
 5,142 rounds of small
 arms ammo.
 35 mortar rounds
 13 rockets
 514 claymore mines
 25,273 grenades of vari-
 ous types
 1,075 pounds of explosive
 4,000 blasting caps/booby
 trap ignitors
 752 bangalore torpedoes
 500 fuzing devices
 80 grenade launchers
 500 rifle grenade adapters
 400 claymore mine stands
 1,121 tons of rice
 123 pounds of documents
 151 bicycles

Equipment Destroyed

297 buildings
 502 bunkers
 92 tunnels
 9 base camps
 1 claymore factory
 37 caves
 1,600 small arms/mor-
 tar/artillery rounds
 132 grenades
 79 mines/booby traps
 1,263 tons of rice
 7,955 pounds of fish
 9,000 pounds of tobacco

12. On the surface, the loss of nearly 2,400 tons of rice would appear to constitute a serious logistical blow to the Communists. However,

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the Viet Cong were able to replenish some 2,200 tons of rice confiscated by US forces this spring during the conduct of Operation BIRMINGHAM in this same general area of Tay Ninh Province in a period of less than five days after the operation ended. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of rice losses in both operations has probably strained at least to some extent the Viet Cong's replenishment capability.

13. Operation ATTLEBORO was also responsible for generating an exodus of nearly 16,000 refugees from areas under Communist control in northern Tay Ninh Province. While this will undoubtedly exacerbate the government's refugee resettlement problem in Tay Ninh, it will also have the positive effect of reducing the local manpower pool available to the Viet Cong for recruitment into their military ranks and for troop support activities such as food production and portering.

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Long-Term Significance

14. Operation ATTLEBORO did not permanently impair the capability of large-scale Communist forces to continue to utilize War Zone "C" and its surrounding environs both as sanctuary and as a base from which to launch future operations. The allied offensive did, however, provide a demonstration to the Communist leaders of the vulnerability of one of their most formidable preserves--War Zone "C"--to mobile warfare and mass assault tactics. Moreover, the temporary disruption of the command and control facilities of COSVN may well force the Communists to do some long-range thinking about their ability to concentrate an extensive command and training complex in this area.

15. Recent commentaries by the Viet Cong's Liberation Radio suggest that the Communists hope they can more effectively counter large allied thrusts in the future by coordinating their defense with increased and sizable offensive actions elsewhere. One such broadcast on 2 December claimed that ATTLEBORO cost the allies more than 3,000 casualties in their "bitterest defeat" to date. It alleged that while the allies were "locked up" in Tay Ninh, Communist military successes were being scored in nearby provinces. The thrust of the article was that the Communist forces must make even greater efforts in the future to launch significant diversionary strikes during large-scale allied operations.

16. There have also been increasing indications in Communist propaganda media that the big allied spoiling attacks, including those less spectacular than ATTLEBORO, may have played a major role in motivating the Viet Cong high command to call for an increased emphasis on guerrilla warfare. The Communists apparently now view guerrilla tactics as the least costly, and perhaps the main way still open to them, in confronting the expanded allied military presence in South Vietnam.

Cambodian Reaction

17. It appears that ATTLEBORO may have brought home to Phnom Penh the increasing risk of Cambodian

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involvement in the war as US actions increase in scope and force Viet Cong units to seek refuge in Cambodian territory. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the new head of the Cambodian military has recently ordered the army to take firm action to drive all Vietnamese from Cambodian territory. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Cambodian Government was "very concerned" over possible Viet Cong incursions resulting from ATTLEBORO. [REDACTED]

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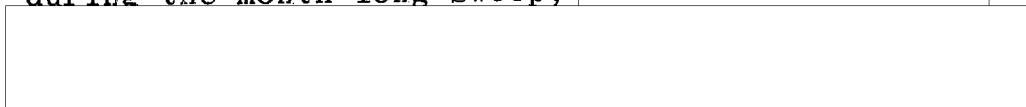
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[REDACTED] reinforced Cambodian border forces turned back a Viet Cong element on 20 November and refused to allow the Communists to evacuate their wounded into Cambodia.

18. It seems probable, however, that some Viet Cong elements did take refuge in Cambodia during ATTLEBORO, despite heightened Cambodian vigilance. As indicated above, radio direction finding placed some Viet Cong elements close to or over the border during the month-long sweep, [REDACTED]

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19. It is clear that with severely limited resources Cambodia cannot exercise effective control over the 600-mile border, even if it chose to mount a much greater effort. It is probable, however, that the Viet Cong will in the future encounter somewhat greater difficulties in dealing with the Cambodians during cross-border operations.



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